

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EURE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 USIE-00 INRE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8868

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

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AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PARIS 10877

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS: AFTER THE FIRST
ROUND

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1. SUMMARY. CHABAN-DELMAS' ELIMINATION ON THE FIRST ROUND OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS MARKS THE DEFINITIVE END OF SIXTEEN YEARS OF GAULLIST DOMINATION OF FRENCH POLITICS. REGARDLESS OF WHETHER MITTERRAND OR GISCARD D'ESTAING WINS THE MAY 19 RUNOFF, FRANCE HAS SIGNALLED AN END TO GAULLIST SUPREMACY AND SO TURNS A PAGE IN ITS HISTORY. GAULLISTS WILL CONTINUE, HOWEVER, TO EXERT AN IMPORTANT INFLUENCE ON FRENCH POLITICS. IRONICALLY CHABAN, WHO BELONGS TO THE OUTWARD-LOOKING WING OF HIS PARTY, BECAME TIED TO THE GAULLIST OLD GUARD DURING THE CAMPAIGN AND COULD NOT SHAKE LOOSE. SECOND ROUND WILL DETERMINE WHETHER FRANCE WILL SETTLE FOR GISCARD'S "CHANGE WITHOUT RISK" OR IS PREPARED TO VENTURE INTO THE MORE UNCERTAIN WORLD OF MITTERRAND'S SOCIALISM. RUNOFF WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE CLOSER THAN ANY PREVIOUS FIFTH REPUBLIC PRESIDENTIAL RACE. END SUMMARY.

2. CHABAN'S COLLAPSE: FIFTEEN PERCENT. FROM THE BEGINNING NOTHING IN CHABAN'S CAMPAIGN WENT RIGHT. TO KEEP FROM BEING FROZEN OUT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE HE

ANNOUNCED HIS CANDIDACY WITHIN HOURS OF POMPIDOU'S BURIAL, ONLY TO BE CRITICIZED PUBLICLY FOR UNSEEMLY HASTE. HE WAS FORCED TO BEGIN HIS CAMPAIGN AGAINST A BACKGROUND OF MANEUVERS BY MEMBERS OF POMPIDOU'S ELYSEE STAFF OPPOSED TO HIS CANDIDACY (JUILLET, GARAUD) AND WITH PRIME MINISTER MESSMER AND INTERIOR MINISTER CHIRAC (BOTH OF CHABAN'S PARTY) OPENLY TRYING TO BLOCK HIS BID. WHILE THE 1972 INCOME TAX SCANDALS DID NOT BECOME AN OPEN CAMPAIGN ISSUE, CHABAN NEVERTHELESS COULD NOT QUITE SHAKE THE SLIGHTLY TAINTED IMAGE THEY PRODUCED. HE TRIED TO USE HIS ATTRACTIVE WIFE TO BOLSTER HIS CAMPAIGN APPEARANCES, ONLY TO HAVE HER PRESENCE REMIND THE PUBLIC THAT HE HAS BEEN MARRIED THREE TIMES, LASTLY TO A DIVORCEE -- A HEAVY HANDICAP IN CATHOLIC FRANCE. HE WAS NOT PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE ON TELEVISION, AND THE FACE-TO-FACE DEBATES DID NOT HELP HIM OVERCOME HIS REPUTATION AS AN INTELLECTUAL LIGHTWEIGHT IN COMPARISON WITH MITTERRAND AND GISCARD. OF THE LEADING PRESS ORGANS, ONLY LE POINT SUPPORTED HIM (MONDE CAME OUT FOR MITTERRAND).

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RAND, FIGARO AND AURORE FOR GISCARD, AND EXPRESS AGAINST CHABAN). AND MESSMER, AFTER A LUKEWARM, TARDY STATEMENT OF SUPPORT, DECLINED TO PLAY AN ACTIVE PART IN HIS CAMPAIGN.

3. CHABAN NEVER MANAGED TO MAKE HIS "NEW SOCIETY" APPEALING. HE COULD NOT CONVINCE THE PUBLIC THAT THE PROGRAMS HE UNDERTOOK DURING HIS 1969-72 PRIME MINISTRY

REALLY REPRESENTED SIGNIFICANT MEASURES FOR
SOCIAL PROGRESS AND CHANGE. AND HIS STRONG ANTI-
COMMUNIST LINE, ALTHOUGH DOUBTLESS APPEALING TO THE
RIGHT-WING GAULLISTS WHOSE SUPPORT HE ALREADY HAD, WAS
NOT PERSUASIVE TO A YOUNGER, MORE CENTER-LEFT ORIENTED,
MORE SOPHISTICATED FRENCH PUBLIC.

4. IT IS IRONIC THAT CHABAN, WHO BELONGS TO THE OUTWARD-
LOOKING WING OF HIS PARTY, BECAME TIED TO THE UDR OLD
GUARD AND COULD NOT SHAKE LOOSE. (NEITHER MITTERRAND
NOR GISCARD COMMITTED CHABAN'S ERROR OF BECOMING TOO
CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH A SINGLE PARTY.) CHABAN DREAMED
OF OCCUPYING THE CENTER, BUT WAS THE VICTIM OF AN ERROR
OF POLITICAL IDENTITY AS WELL AS OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8869

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AND TACTICAL MISTAKES WHICH MARKED HIS CAMPAIGN. AT A TIME WHEN FRANCE CLEARLY WANTS CHANGE, CHABAN WAS TOO SHARPLY IDENTIFIED WITH A GAULLISM ALREADY SIXTEEN YEARS IN POWER -- AND THIS TURNED OUT TO BE AN INSURMOUNTABLE HANDICAP. POMPIDOU MAY HAVE BEEN ABLE TO BALANCE THE DIFFERENT TENDENCIES IN THE GAULLIST PARTY AND THUS
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PROLONG THE ILLUSION OF GAULLIST UNITY. THIS ABILITY WAS NOT TRANSFERABLE TO CHABAN, HOWEVER. THE MAY 5 RESULTS SHOWED THAT GAULLISM AS THE PRIME MOVING FORCE IN THE FRENCH GOVERNMENT AND ITS DOMINATION OF FRENCH POLITICS HAS COME TO AN END. HOWEVER, THE GAULLISTS HOLD 183 OF 490 ASSEMBLY SEATS, HAVE A STRONG PARTY ORGANIZATION THROUGHOUT FRANCE, AND WILL CONTINUE TO EXERT AN IMPORTANT INFLUENCE ON FRENCH POLITICS.

5. MITTERRAND: 43.4 PERCENT. HAVING BENEFITTED FROM THE RIVALRY AND BICKERING ON THE RIGHT, MITTERRAND ENTERS THE SECOND ROUND CAMPAIGN IN A FAIRLY STRONG POSITION. WHILE HE FELL JUST SHORT OF THE 45 PERCENT HE AND HIS SUPPORTERS HAD HOPED TO REACH, HIS FIRST-ROUND VOTE IS ABOUT THE SAME AS THE TOTAL LEFT PERCENTAGE IN THE FIRST ROUND OF THE 1973 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, AND SO REPRESENTS NEARLY THE FULL STRENGTH OF SOCIALIST, COMMUNIST AND LEFT RADICAL SUPPORTERS. HE CAN COUNT ON MAINTAINING NEARLY ALL HIS PRESENT SUPPORT AND SHOULD GAIN MOST OF THE 4 PERCENT WHO SUPPORTED EXTREME LEFTISTS LAGUILLER AND KRIVINE AND ECOLOGIST DUMONT (ALL THREE HAVE COME OUT FOR MITTERRAND). HE MUST TRY TO PICK UP THE VOTES OF SOME CENTRISTS, SOME LEFT GAULLISTS AND SOME WHO VOTED FOR ROYER TO FORM HIS PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. THE KEY QUESTION IS WHETHER THE COMMUNIST SUPPORT THAT BROUGHT MITTERRAND WITHIN STRIKING DISTANCE OF HIS GOAL WILL WORK TO DENY HIM THE NARROW PORTION OF CENTER AND LEFT GAULLIST SUPPORT HE NOW NEEDS TO WIN. WE EXPECT MITTERRAND TO CONTINUE THE HIGH INTELLECTUAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL POSTURE HE HAS ADOPTED UP TO NOW, COMBINING HIS FORENSIC SKILLS WITH A STATEMANLIKE IMAGE AS THE LEADER OF THE UNITED LEFT.

6. GISCARD: 33 PERCENT. GISCARD DID SLIGHTLY BETTER THAN THE POLLS INDICATED, AND RECEIVED MORE THAN TWICE AS MANY VOTES AS CHABAN. HE MUST CAPITALIZE ON HIS EXCELLENT SHOWING AND MOVE IMMEDIATELY TO HEAL THE WOUNDS CAUSED BY HIS DUEL WITH CHABAN, AND BY THE PRE-ELECTION MANEUVERINGS WITHIN THE UDR AND THE PRESENT MAJORITY. WHILE THE FIRST-ROUND CAMPAIGNING WAS SHARP, IT WAS NOT BITTER. BOTH GISCARD AND CHABAN AVOIDED QUARRELS OR SERIOUS
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PERSONAL ATTACKS (EVEN THOUGH THEY DISLIKE EACH OTHER), THUS MAKING IT EASIER FOR THE MAJORITY TO CLOSE RANKS NOW BEHIND GISCARD IN OPPOSING MITTERRAND. MESSMER, GUICHARD AND SANGUINETTI HAVE ALREADY PLEDGED TO SUPPORT GISCARD, ALTHOUGH CHABAN HAS SO FAR ONLY COME OUT AGAINST MITTERRAND. GISCARD WILL NEED EVERY BIT OF THE GAULLIST VOTE PLUS MOST OF THE ROYER VOTE. HE MUST REDOUBLE HIS EFFORTS TO PORTRAY HIMSELF AS A CENTRIST, AND RESIST MITTERRAND'S ATTEMPTS TO BRAND HIM AS A RIGHT CONSERVATIVE. HE MUST ALSO DEMONSTRATE THAT, IF ELECTED, HE WILL MOVE QUICKLY TO INTRODUCE SOCIAL WELFARE REFORMS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO SEE HOW GISCARD AND HIS SUPPORTERS WILL BE ABLE TO REFRAIN FROM BEATING THE ANTI-COMMUNIST DRUM DURING THE SECOND-ROUND CAMPAIGN.

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7. FIRST-ROUND VOTING WAS NOTABLE FOR NEAR RECORD
TURNOUT OF 85 PERCENT OF REGISTERED VOTERS IN METROPOL-
ITAN FRANCE. POLLS TURNED OUT TO BE QUITE ACCURATE,
PARTICULARLY IFOP, WHOSE FINAL POLL WAS WITHIN 2-3
PERCENTAGE POINTS FOR EACH CANDIDATE. ALSO IFOP'S
PROJECTIONS OF FIRST-ROUND RESULTS, BASED ON EARLY
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RETURNS AND ANNOUNCED AT MOMENT POLLS CLOSED IN METRO-
POLITAN FRANCE, WERE INCREDIBLY ACCURATE (PROJECTIONS
GAVE MITTERRAND 43.5 PERCENT, GISCARD 32.5, CHABAN 14.5,
ROYER 3.5, LAGUILLER 2.5). TROTSKYIST MISS LAGUILLER
SURPRISED OBSERVERS BY GETTING 2.4 PERCENT, WHILE ROYER,
WITH ONLY 3.2, DISAPPOINTED HIS FOLLOWERS.

8. DOWN THE HOME STRETCH. THE DECISIVE LAST LAP IS NOW
UNDERWAY. MITTERRAND IS SAVORING A POSSIBLE VICTORY BUT
HAS CRUCIAL AND DIFFICULT MARGIN STILL TO WIN.
GISCARD HAS TO UNITE THE MAJORITY EFFECTIVELY BEHIND HIM,
CONTINUE TO BUILD MOMENTUM AND FURTHER IMPROVE HIS
"SOCIAL" IMAGE. THE CAMPAIGN WILL REACH A PEAK OF
INTENSITY DURING THE FINAL WEEK. ALL SIGNS POINT TO A
VERY CLOSE CONTEST -- POSSIBLY A CLIFF-HANGER -- ON MAY
19, WITH THE WINNER GAINING THE MOST POWERFUL SINGLE JOB
IN WESTERN EUROPE.
IRWIN

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Message Attributes

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